

TRANSFORMING CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Is it possible to encourage the development of discerning reading habits in students by using a blog?

Joshua and Kimberly Brown, English teachers at Macquarie College in Newcastle saw a need to intentionally nurture in their students the love of reading and the ability to critically reflect. Blogging opened up the possibility to achieve this.

"Committing to a book is like committing to a new friendship. It takes time and effort and is almost always worth it." Many young people today struggle with reading resilience and find it difficult to pick up a full form novel. However, there is an exception to this paradigm; when a friend recommends a book it becomes a 'surer bet', a less risky investment of the reader's time.

It was this observation that gave birth to brownbooks.org. My wife Kimberly and I are both English teachers with a mutual love of literature. We noticed that students were far more likely to read a book that we had read ourselves and that was offered as a personal suggestion. From that moment onwards every book we have read has

been added to our website along with a short review and a star rating.

As the project grew we sorted texts into categories and have now established multiple pages on the website. Visitors to brownbooks also have access to related text suggestions for the Higher School Certificate in NSW and a page on creative writing skills. Although initially designed for our students the blog has taken on a wider audience with views coming in from across the state.

It is our intention that brownbooks is the conduit into a world of literary exploration. It is also important that as professional educators we practice our craft and model good reading habits to our students. Barry Schwartz in his publication *The Paradox of Choice* (2004) indicates that consumers, and in this case readers, actually experience a sense of inertia when presented with an abundance of options. As such, brownbooks is simply there to say, 'I read this, I think you'd like it' therefore enhancing a young person's ability to make an educated reading choice." **TEACH**

References

Schwartz, B. (2004). *The paradox of choice*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

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Josh Brown
blogging books

[Photograph:
Kimberly Brown]